

Fake cent is a real work of [con] art

By Roger Boye

One of the finest quality counterfeits ever seen.

That's how coinage experts recently described a fraudulent 1909-S VDB cent they "discovered" after examining the piece with sophisticated equipment. The fake is extremely deceptive and could fool even experienced hobbyists, let alone novices.

"We don't want to scare people, but collectors must be careful when buying rare coins," advised Kenneth Bressett, director of the American Numismatic Association Certification Service. Genuine 1909-S VDB cents in uncirculated condition—the kingpins of the Lincoln penny series—retail for \$400 or more in uncirculated condition.

ANA staffers in Colorado viewed the suspect coin under high magnification, looking at design features and minute chips in the metal. Eventually, they detected the fraud by comparing the cent with photographs of other high-quality counterfeits.

"At least one con artist is improving his techniques," said Thomas DeLorey, the ANA's senior authenticator.

The ANA, the nation's largest organization of coin buffs, authenticates and grades coins for collectors who pay a modest fee.

● Nearly 125 coin dealers will be hawking their wares in mid-March at the Chicago International Coin Fair, one of the city's biggest annual shows.

The sales area will be open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. March 17 and 18 and from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. March 19 in the Regency Ballroom of the Hyatt Regency Chicago Hotel, 151 E. Wacker Dr. Dealers will come to Chicago from 21 states and 9 foreign countries.

In addition, several well-known hobbyists will address seven collector clubs scheduled to meet in the hotel during the 8th annual fair. A list of events will be available at the fair registration desk near the ballroom.

The Rare Coin Co. of America will auction rare foreign coins as part of the festivities, with auction sessions beginning at 7 p.m. March 17 and 18 and 12:30 p.m. March 19. Approximately 1,040 lots will be on the block.

Admission is free to all fair events, and anyone may attend the club meetings.

● Government laborers churned out a record 19.5 billion coins last year, an average of 85 pieces for every U.S. citizen.

The total includes 16.7 billion Lincoln cents, evidence of the U.S. Mint's apparently successful efforts to end the penny shortage. Dimes ranked second, with just over 1 billion pieces produced.

Last year's coinage has a face value of \$564 million, about \$2.50 worth of change per resident.